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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **MONROE COUNTY PLANS PREVENTIVE MEASURES AGAINST WEST NILE VIRUS**

Monroe County Health Director Dr. Andrew S. Doniger today unveiled the county's plan to deal with West Nile Virus (WNV) in the upcoming mosquito season -- a plan that relies heavily on preventive measures and public education.

West Nile virus (WNV) is an infection transmitted by mosquitoes and not seen in the United States before 1999. It is now believed to be established in the environment throughout New York State and in Monroe County and is unlikely to be eradicated.

"Our primary defense against West Nile Virus must be to limit the amount of human-mosquito contact to the greatest extent possible," Doniger said. "To do that, we need to reduce mosquito populations by eliminating standing water where possible and reduce mosquito bites through the use of repellents."

Older people and individuals with weakened immune systems are at highest risk from WNV. Children are not considered to be at high risk. In 2000, 14 New Yorkers (all downstate) became ill and one person, an 87 year-old woman, died from WNV. This was down from 62 ill and seven deaths in 1999. In New York, the average age of people who became ill from WNV was 61; there were no cases reported among children in 2000.

Health officials encourage residents to immediately begin draining standing water on their property and continue to do so throughout the summer season to reduce the mosquito population. Mosquitoes do not travel great distances, so keeping property dry will reduce the overall mosquito population around a person's home.

In some cases, where water cannot be drained, a mosquito "larvicide" can be used to kill larvae. Homeowners can buy the larvicide "dunks" at home and garden stores, but can only use them on their own property.

The Health Department and the Department of Pure Waters will be conducting limited larviciding in catch basins in neighborhoods where there are concentrated senior citizen populations.

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Use of insect repellents are also encouraged for people who will be outdoors during times when mosquitoes are most active, particularly for high-risk individuals. Product directions should be followed closely.

An important part of the plan, Doniger said, will be a program of public education about the real risks of WNV, and what people can do to avoid them.

“We don’t want to downplay the risks too much,” he said. “But neither do we want people to be unnecessarily alarmed. The risks associated with West Nile Virus are significantly smaller than the risks associated with influenza in terms of the numbers of people who will be affected.”

All of the human cases of WNV that occurred in the New York city area are thought to have been contracted from mid-late August through mid-September. Although some species of mosquitoes have already begun to appear, the species of mosquito (*Culex Pipiens*) that has been most responsible for transmitting WNV does not usually emerge in large numbers until much later in the season.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the statistical probability of being bitten by a mosquito with WNV, and then becoming seriously ill as a result of the bite, is very low. Very few mosquitoes – much less than 1% - carry the virus. If bitten by an infected mosquito - less than 1% - of people will become seriously ill.

Many people bitten by an infected mosquito will have no symptoms; others may develop a slight fever or headache. Severe infections can cause a rapid onset of high fever, head and body aches usually 5-15 days after exposure. People who develop severe symptoms should consult a doctor. There is no vaccine for WNV.

In conformance with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and the New York State Health Department, Monroe County will use a hierarchical approach to reducing the risk of illness from WNV:

- Education about personal protective measures
- Reduction of standing water where practical
- Selective use of larvicide

“We believe that, if people take the proper precautions, West Nile Virus is an environmental pathogen -- like influenza or even the common cold -- that we can live with,” Doniger said. “In the end, we have no choice -- West Nile Virus is here to stay.”

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*See us on the web: [www.co.monroe.ny.us](http://www.co.monroe.ny.us)*

# Monroe County Department of Health

## West Nile Virus Fact Sheet

### Personal Protection

- Who's most at risk of serious illness from WNV?
  - People at highest risk from WNV include persons over age 50 and people with weakened immune systems. The average age of people made seriously ill from WNV in New York was 61 in 2000. Children and healthy adults are not considered to be at higher-risk, but should still be cautious
- Mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn; minimize outdoor activity during these times if possible
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants if outside during hours when mosquitoes are at their peak
- Consider use of an insect repellent containing DEET; be careful to follow all instructions
  - Apply repellent outdoors
  - Do not allow young children to apply the product themselves
  - Wash thoroughly with soap and water after returning indoors for the evening

### Drain standing water on your property

- Mosquitoes can breed in containers as small as a bottle cap
- Dispose of tires, tin cans, plastic containers and anything else not needed that collects water
- Drain children's pools when not in use
- Drain pool covers
- Fill in low areas on your property that hold water for more than a few days

### Report ONLY dead crows to the MCHD at 234-9600 (an automated number available 24/7)

- It is not necessary to report bird species other than crows at this time. Crows have the highest mortality from WNV and will serve as the best marker that the illness has re-emerged in our area. Because it is assumed that the virus will return this year, the New York State Health Department does not believe it is necessary to test all dead crows. Only a small number, several per week, will be submitted for testing this year.

## **Testing**

- Bird - reported dead crows will be plotted on a map to ascertain the density of bird deaths in a particular geographic area. These data will be used to evaluate the potential for human disease
- Mosquito - to gauge the distribution and abundance of mosquitoes, environmental staff will increase efforts over last year to routinely collect samples of both live mosquitoes and larvae from multiple locations within Monroe County.
- Human - communicable disease control staff will work closely with the medical community to ensure rapid laboratory diagnosis of all suspect cases of human WNV to promptly detect an outbreak.

## **Mosquito Larvicide**

- Health officials will utilize GIS mapping to identify areas in Monroe County with the highest concentrations of older residents and selectively larvicide catch basins to reduce mosquito populations. Given the mobility and range of birds, once the virus is detected in Monroe County, it should be assumed to be present county-wide. The large number of areas of standing water and otherwise traditionally wet areas will preclude the ability to apply larvicide to all such areas. Municipalities have committed to reduce standing water where possible.

## **Mosquito Adulticide (Spraying)**

- Adulticides (spraying) will be considered only if the risk of human disease is high; for example if a cluster of human cases occurs in a particular area.

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